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STATE FOR EUR/CACEN, SA

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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: GOVT UNABLE TO HANDLE POTENTIAL AVIAN FLU
OUTBREAK

REF: STATE 00209622

This cable is in response to STATE 00209622: Request for
Information on Avian and Pandemic Influenza

PREPAREDNESS/COMMUNICATION

1. Head Veterinarian, Dr. Mulojon Amirbekov, explicitly stated that Tajikistan is not prepared to combat an Avian Flu outbreak. Tajikistan does not have a strategy for containing a pandemic if it occurs; however, various government ministries have taken measures, within their capabilities, to avoid an outbreak. The Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health are the lead departments working to devise preventative steps. The Main Board of Veterinary Service and State Veterinary Inspection, housed under the Ministry of Agriculture, is the most informed department and is spearheading prevention. Deputy Minister of Health, Zievuddin Avgonov is the primary point of contact in the Ministry of Health.

2. Amirbekov admitted the government does not understand the seriousness of Avian Flu, paying minimal attention to the issue. There are no specific funds for fighting an influenza outbreak. The Veterinary Service has brought this problem to the government's attention. Amirbekov believes the Prime Minister would be an influential person who could give the issue due attention, but he has not yet acted.

3. The Ministries of Health and Agriculture recognize the importance of a collaborative international effort to prevent Avian Flu from proliferating and would like to join the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza. The government, given its scant resources however, has decided to take the "wait and see" strategy and will not join unless Avian Flu is at its doorsteps.

4. Tajikistan is cooperating with regional governments only on an ad hoc basis by implementing border controls and cooperating on testing. There is no formal regional working group on Avian Flu. Tajikistan's strongest partner is Kazakhstan where they are sending sample strains to be tested at the Institute of Agriculture and Veterinary Institute in Aqtau, Kazakhstan. Two veterinarian specialists await funding for a training trip to Kazakhstan to learn how to combat Avian Flu. Amirbekov hopes to send three to four experts from every region to Kazakhstan for training. The cost would be \$500-\$600 per person.

5. Tajikistan has requested financial assistance from international NGOs and USAID, but has not yet received positive responses. Amirbekov lamented in the press the lack of funds for prevention. According to him, Tajikistan needs \$100,000 to prevent an outbreak of Avian Flu. Avgonov has also claimed the need for six million dollars' worth of vaccinations. The country does not produce flu vaccines and thus far has not bought any vaccines or medication due to the prohibitive cost. Tajikistan is open to assistance from the United States through bilateral or multilateral means.

6. Vaccines, medicine, or other supplies from donor countries will be subject to import laws unless the Ministry waives import duties on an emergency basis. Amirbekov claims there is a liability shield in place for foreign donors. All medicines are inspected prior to use.

7. The government's public statements about Avian Flu have focused on the limited measures the government has taken to prevent the flu. They have not educated the public effectively about personal safety measures. Avgonov admitted to PolOff that even medical professionals had asked for information about the virus. The Ministry of Health designed an educational piece for public dissemination, but it has not been produced due to lack

of funds. The Veterinary Service, in conjunction with the World Food Program, prepared a brochure to train farmers to detect the virus. Representatives from both Ministries appeared on state television to inform the public and alert farmers to sources of help.

8. It is questionable how forthright the government will be in announcing any cases of Avian Flu. Earlier this year, there was a suspected cholera outbreak in northern Tajikistan, which the

government attempted to cover-up and would not admit was cholera. The economic and political ramifications of an Avian Flu outbreak might encourage the government to remain silent and conceal any cases.

SURVEILLANCE/DETECTION

9. The Veterinary Service and the Ministry of Health have implemented several measures in efforts to prevent Avian Flu from entering Tajikistan. The government banned poultry products from ten countries including Russia, Kazakhstan, China, and Turkey. Tajikistan now imports 95 percent of chicken and poultry products from Brazil, Canada, and the United States. Ninety-five percent of eggs are imported from Iran.

10. The Chief Veterinarian believes that because vaccines are prohibitively expensive, the most effective and easiest way to stave off a pandemic would be to eliminate or quarantine the birds. The government is working on developing the country's own supply of healthy poultry products and therefore has imposed a quarantine on all of the country's large poultry farms. In addition, Tajikistan has begun to more closely control its border with Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and China. The Head Veterinarian sought permission from the State Committee for Environmental Protection and Forestry to shoot migratory birds and test them for the virus. Experts from the Veterinary Service have begun to inspect chicken and poultry products in the local markets and on all poultry farms.

11. Tajikistan used diagnostics equipment purchased from Russia to test 200 strain samples at facilities in country. However, Kazakhstan has more sensitive and reliable equipment and the previously tested strains are being sent to Kazakhstan to be retested. Because Tajikistan relies on Kazakhstan, there will inevitably be a lag.

12. Tajikistan's veterinarians have also developed a project for monitoring and studying immune-biological features of pathogenic organisms for Avian Flu, which they hope to implement in 2006-2008. However, they lack funds to carry out the project. The most requested funding is to train Tajik experts to monitor and detect the problem.

RESPONSE/CONTAINMENT

13. Tajikistan has no official plan to respond to an outbreak of even one case of Avian Flu. Due to a lack of funds, the government cannot stockpile antiviral medication, vaccines or protective gear for the population. If a case occurs, the government would attempt to localize it by quarantining the farm or local village, eliminating infected birds, and disinfecting contaminated facilities. Tajikistan purchased three tons of disinfectants from Russia for these purposes. There is no response plan in place to deal with a human contraction of the virus.

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